

Natural Heritage Resources Fact Sheet

Swamp Pink (*Helonias bullata*)

Description

Swamp pink is one of Virginia's most stunning native wildflowers. A member of the Lily family, it is a perennial evergreen herb. Its oblong leaves grow at ground level in a radiating cluster called a *rosette*. The leaves persist through the winter. Young leaves are bright green and may be from 3 to 10 inches long; older dark green leaves may reach a length of 16 inches.

During winter, leaves sometimes turn red-brown and often lie flat on the ground. Small pink flowers with lilac-colored anthers, or pollen producing structures, grow in dense clusters at the end of a long, hollow, leafless stem. The stem length ranges from 8 to 35 inches at flowering and can be 60 inches by the time seeds mature. Swamp pink blooms in April and May.

Habitat

Swamp pink is found in perennially saturated, spring-fed, nutrient-poor, shrub swamps and forested wetlands. Typically, swamp pink grows with such species as sphagnum moss, red maple, spicebush, green-brier, black gum, and various wetland ferns and sedges. It requires stable water levels and can tolerate only brief or infrequent flooding. In Virginia populations of swamp pink are found in the mountains and the coastal plain.

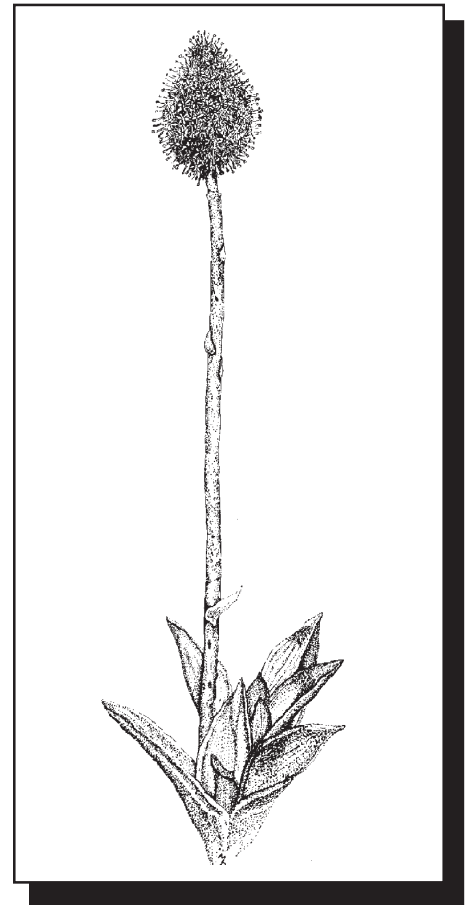
Distribution

Swamp pink is found in New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia. Formerly, it also occurred in New York, but is now extirpated there. Northern populations are found primarily in the coastal plain; southern populations are concentrated in the mountains. New Jersey and Virginia have coastal plain and mountain populations. In Virginia, swamp pink is known from four counties: Augusta, Nelson, Caroline and Henrico.

Life History

Reproduction of swamp pink is primarily by vegetative means. New rosettes grow from underground stems called rhizomes. The new plants emerge very close to the parent plant.

Reproduction through seed appears to play a lesser role in maintaining a population. One reason for this is that relatively few plants flower. Another is that seeds and seedlings have a low survival rate. Seed dispersal appears to be limited; observers have noted seeds fall to the ground immediately around the plant. However, fat content of the seeds is high, which allows them to float. One study has shown that ants prefer swamp pink seeds over other seeds, suggesting that ants may play a role in seed dispersal.



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Conservation

Swamp pink is listed as endangered by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. As a wetland-dependent species, swamp pink is susceptible to activities which have major influences on water quality or quantity. While many activities are compatible with swamp pink conservation, activities which increase sedimentation, pollutant runoff, or cause flooding of habitat should be



Department of Conservation & Recreation
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

For more information, contact
Department of Conservation and Recreation
203 Governor Street, Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-7951; <http://www.state.va.us/~dcr/vaher.html>

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avoided. Vehicular and foot traffic are best directed away from these areas. Dambuilding by beavers is also a potential threat to swamp pink habitat.

Landowners and managers can take positive steps to ensure conservation of swamp pink and its habitat. Knowledge of the presence of rare species and use of *best management practices* contribute to informed land use decisions. DCR's Natural Heritage staff maintains a database on the presence of our state's natural heritage occur-

rences. Natural Heritage biologists, stewardship and protection staff can help landowners with questions regarding rare species and sensitive habitats. The staff also provides information and expertise concerning conservation and management practices which help ensure that we preserve and pass on to future Virginians our rich natural heritage.

To learn more about Virginia's rare plant and animal species and rich biological communities write to the following: *Plant and Insect Species* - Virginia Department of

Agriculture and Consumer Services, Office of Plant Protection, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, Virginia 23209; *Animal Species* - Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, Virginia 23230; *Plants, Animals, or Biological Communities* - Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Natural Heritage, Main Street Station, 1500 East Main Street, Suite 312, Richmond, Virginia 23219.



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